

CALLING JACK'S BLUFF

A CAMP PLAYLET FOR BOYS
IN ONE ACT

BY
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Author

The Missing Link, The Upper Trail, Kid's Awakening,
Father Ex-Officio, and other plays for boys.

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Second Session—Chapter Four.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(In Order of Appearance)

Ed Foster.....	Jack's Pal
Dave Marshall.....	One of the Gang
Dick Goldsmith.....	Jack's Rival
Jack Thornton.....	The Camp Bully
Bill Williams.....	Pitcher for the Team
Mr. Hale.....	Camp Director
Orion Grant.....	The Homesick Boy
Silas Corntassel.....	A Neighboring Farmer
Sam Jason.....	Keeper of the Camp Store
Amos Squire.....	Constable

Chauffeur, Camp Doctor, Other Boys of the Camp.

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ACT I.

SCENE—Boys' Camp, Anywhere.

Wood setting, with tent at left marked "Headquarters."

TIME—Early afternoon.

At rise of curtain Jim and Bill are playing catch in the background; Dick is lying on the ground reading a book; in front center Ed and Dave stand glaring at each other as though their argument has just reached a climax.

Ed—You're too fresh, Dave Marshall, and if you say any more, I'll change the color of your eyebrow. Get me?

Dave—Oh, quit your kiddin'. It would take a man to do that.

Ed—Is that so? Well, we'll see. (*Begins to take off his coat.*)

Dick—(*Looking up from his book*)—Say, you fellows make me tired. All you do is to quarrel and raise rough house. If you'd stop your scrapping, you'd get a whole lot more out of this camp.

Ed—This is none of your affair, Dick. You're always butting in with your sissified ideas.

Dick—It depends on what you mean by sissified, Ed. I know several fellows around here who are very brave when it comes to bullying a guy a head shorter than they are, but who get rather weak in the knees if one their own size calls the bluff.

Ed—I suppose you mean me for one, and Jack Thornton for the other.

Dick—Your keenness of perception is nothing short of marvelous, Ed.

Ed—I don't get your high-brow language, but when I tell Jack what you're sayin' about him, we'll see who's right on the under-size business.

Dick—There you go, first thing. Instead of defending your own rights, you call in Jack to help you.

Ed—Well, Jack's my pal, and he's the real goods, believe me.

Dave—Yes, if what everybody says is true, he's car-

ryin' around a lot of goods that don't belong to him.

Ed—(Threateningly)—You say another word against Jack, you little white-livered, moon-faced, sawed off, hammered-down . . .

Dick—(Jumping up)—Wait a minute there! (*Approaching the boys*)—One of you may get hurt if you keep that up. Dave, you want to be a little more careful of what you say about a bully like Jack, because he'll lay for you. And let me give you a piece of advice, Ed. If you want to stay in this Camp, you'd better cut loose from this pal of yours. You know there are ugly rumors going around about who's responsible for the damage that was done to the farmhouse down the road the other night, and if I'm not mistaken, Jack's going to get his walking papers pretty soon. You don't want to go with him, do you?

Ed—You seem to have a lot of inside information. I suppose you know what we call a fellow at school, who's in on all the teacher's secrets.

Dick—I'm not in on any secrets, and you know mighty well that I'm no teacher's pet; but I've been coming here for three years, and I know that Mr. Hale won't keep a boy in Camp who's not on the square, and who's always bullying the little fellows. I've seen more than one go home for that, and you're too fine a kid to get mixed up in it. You were getting along great until you struck up this new partnership.

Ed—Keep your pretty compliments to yourself, Dick, I know what I'm doin'.

Dick—All right, but take it from me, you'll get wise some day.

(*Enter Jack*)

Jack—Hello kids, what's the row?

Ed—Oh, the Reverend Doctor Richard is in his pulpit again. He's been giving us some more of his fatherly advice, but just now he's been telling us how much he loves you.

Jack—Oh, he has, eh? Well, one of these days I'm going to return his compliments with interest.

Ed—He says you broke the windows in Farmer Corn-tassel's house the other night, and that you're going to get the can.

Dick—That's not the whole truth, Ed. I spoke of the rumors that are going around, and I gave my personal opinion of what may happen, that's all.

Jack—Well, you're getting mighty close to the hospital, Dick Goldsmith, when you go airin' your views around here. Some day I'll hit you so hard that the wind from the blow will give you pneumonia before it ever hits you.

Dick—(*Approaching him*)—All right, I'm listening for the sound of the wind.

Jack—(*Taken aback*)—Ah, you're too much of a sissy to fight. You'd turn the other cheek. Ha, ha.

Dick—Well, are you ready to put me to the test?

Jack—(*Looking rather sheepish*)—Go on, you're just trying to pick a fight with me, that's all. But you just wait. Sometime, we'll have it out once for all. Come on, Ed, let's have a game of catch. (*To Bill*)—Here, you kids, give us the ball.

Bill—(*Withholding the ball*)—Well, I like your nerve!

Jack—None of your guff now, or I'll take a fall out of you.

Bill—You can't scare me, Jack. This is my ball, and we're going to play till we're through. See? (*Struggle ensues and Dick comes up just as Jack wrests the ball from Bill.*)

Dick—(*Taking Jack by the shoulder and swinging him around*)—Hand that ball back to him, Jack, and snap out of it quick, too.

Jack—(*Jerking away*)—You keep out of this, Dick. It's none of your funeral.

Dick—Give Bill his ball, or I'll return it to him myself.

Jack—Oh, you will—will you? Take that . . . (*Makes*

a lunge at Dick just as Mr. Hale enters from right of stage. Jack stops short.) . . .

Mr. Hale—Well, well, what is the trouble here?

Dick—(*Saluting*)—Oh, nothing, sir. Jack was just going to show me a new trick in how to be prepared for emergencies.

Mr. Hale—Well, I suggest that some of you be prepared for dinner by getting a few armfuls of wood for the cook. He's waiting for you now. (*Enters tent.*)

Jack—(*To Dick, as all except Jim and Bill exit*)—I'll get you yet, see if I don't.

Jim—(*As he throws ball to Bill*)—Say, Bill, there's only one thing that I've got against this Camp, and that is, there isn't a sign of a movie within a hundred miles. Oh me, Oh my! I thought I would die last night!

Bill—Ah, go on, I should think you'd forget that with all the stunts we have around the camp-fire every evening.

Jim—Yes, they're pretty fine, but I haven't had my hair raised once since I've been here. I'll never forget that last show I saw in the city. It was about a girl that got lost in the jungle, after her father drove her out when she wouldn't marry the fellow he'd picked himself, because she was in love with another man. Oh, say, you ought to have seen it. (*Getting excited and coming forward, followed by Bill.*) The poor girl wanders through the woods, and a tiger chases her till she drops, and then a lion jumps on top of her, and she kills him with a knife. Her clothes are all torn, and there are big marks on her face, and then she faints dead away . . . and her pet elephant finds her and carries her home, and . . .

Bill—(*In loud and disgusted tones*)—Oh, for goodness sake, cut it out, Jim. You give me the creeps out here in the woods. Tonight I'll be yelling in my sleep. Forget it till you are back in town. Let's go get our tent ready for inspection.

(Exit Jim and Bill)

(Enter Orion Grant with open letter in his hand and looking very glum.)

Mr. Hale—(Stepping from tent)—What is the matter, Orion? You look as though something were wrong.

Orion—Something is wrong, Mr. Hale.

Mr. Hale—What is it?

Orion—Oh, nothin'.

Mr. Hale—Well, it can't be very serious if that's the way you feel about it. What is the matter?

Orion—Well—well—I—I—I'm homesick. (*Begins to cry.*)

Mr. Hale—Why, my dear boy, don't take on like that. What has made you homesick so suddenly? (*Puts arm around him.*)

Orion—My mother says she's lonesome, and my father's lonesome, and my little sister's lonesome, and now I'm lonesome and I want to go home. (*Throws himself on the floor in fit of weeping.*)

Mr. Hale—(*Aside*)—Oh, when will parents ever learn how to write to a boy when he's off on a vacation. (*Lifts Orion to his feet.*) Come on, old fellow, lots of boys get homesick during the first few days at Camp, but they soon get over it. Of course, your folks are lonesome. They'd be strange people if they were not. But you are with them all the rest of the year. Let's take a walk in the woods and straighten it out. (*Exit right.*)

(*Jack rushes onto stage from left, followed by Silas Corntassel, who grabs him by the collar.*)

Silas—So I've got ye at last, hev I, ye little hyena (*as Jack struggles to get away*). You and your gang's been a pesterin' me long enough, a robbin' my orchards, drivin' my pigs out into the road, pullin' my wagons into the water, and milkin' my cows, unknownst to me. And now ye go stealin' my chickens!

Jack—I didn't touch 'em. Honest I didn't.

Silas—None o' that. I saw ye a carryin' one down the road, and you fork over five dollars for that bantam rooster, or I'll hev the law on ye. Hurry up.

Jack—I haven't got five dollars.

Silas—Well, you git the money, and be quick about it.

Jack—Let me go, and I'll bring it to you.

Silas—I'll give ye an hour to hev it at my house an' if you don't I'll swear out a warrant fer ye. I mean business. (*Exit.*)

Jack—What'll I do. The old codger'll sure have me in the lock-up, and after that I'll be sent home in disgrace. I wonder where I can get it. I know Mr. Hale always keeps a little money in his desk. I'll just borrow it and pay it back when I get my allowance from home tomorrow. (*Enters tent and returns a moment later.*) A five dollar bill—just enough to save my skin. (*Exits left.*)

(*Enter Dick*)

Dick—Now for the ball game. I wonder where that bat is. Perhaps it's in Headquarters. (*Puts his head in tent.*) Ah, here it is. (*Picks up bat.*)

(*Exits on the run just as Mr. Hale enters and stands looking after him.*)

(*Enter Bill*)

Bill—Say, Mr. Hale, the fruit peddler is waiting for his money.

Mr. Hale—All right, Bill—just a moment. (*Enters tent and returns in a moment looking very much troubled.*) Tell the peddler I'll pay him tomorrow, and then send Dick to me as fast as you can.

Bill—Yes, sir. (*Exit.*)

Mr. Hale—The desk drawer open and the money gone! Can it be that Dick, the straightest fellow in Camp, has stooped so low? I can't believe it. (*Enter Dick.*)

Dick—Did you send for me, Mr. Hale?

Mr. Hale—Dick, what were you doing in my tent a few moments ago?

Dick—Why, I took a baseball bat for the game, sir.

Mr. Hale—I left here for just a few moments. Upon my return I find you running from the tent, and I discover that my desk has been opened, and a five dollar bill is missing. That leads to but one conclusion, Dick.

Dick—Why, Mr. Hale, do you mean to say you believe that I—

Mr. Hale—I hate to think it, but the facts—

Dick—No one has ever dared call me a thief, sir, and I won't stand for it. I—

(Enter Sam Jason)

Sam—Say, Dick—it'll take all my change to break that five spot you gave me for the soda at the store. You can pay up later. *(Holds out five dollar bill.)*

Mr. Hale—Give it to me, Sam. *(Turning to Dick.)* That settles it, young man. Pack your things and be ready to leave Camp on the next train.

Dick—Why, Mr. Hale, that was my own money. My father sent it—I—

Mr. Hale—That will do, Dick. I have never been so disappointed in a fellow in my life. You may consider a dismissal in disgrace a light enough punishment in view of the circumstances.

(Mr. Hale enters tent) (Enter Dave)

Dave—What's the matter, old man? You look sick!

Dick—Dave, I'm being sent home as a common thief. *(Exit with head bowed. Dave also exits with his arm over Dick's shoulder.)*

(Enter Jack, who hears last remark)

Jack—Well, what do you know about that? Dick, of all fellows, accused of taking the money. Well, I'm getting my innings, sure enough. I squared up with old Corntassel, too, so that's fixed.

(Exit) (Enter Constable)

Constable—*(Looking around)*—I wonder who's the boss of this here ranch?

Mr. Hale—*(Coming out of Headquarters Tent)*—I am, sir.

Constable—*(Showing his star)*—Oh, you are, eh? Well, how'd you like spendin' a few weeks in the lock-up for harborin' the all-fireddest bunch of peace-breakers that ever came up the river? How'd you like that, eh?

Mr. Hale—What do you mean, Mr. Constable? What has happened?

Constable—What has happened, says you, what has happened? Say, you're a cool one. What wouldn't happen in a peaceful law abidin' community when you let loose a lot of wild animals? What wouldn't happen, eh?

Mr. Hale—Please calm yourself, sir, and tell me plainly what is the matter.

Constable—Matter? Matter? I'll tell ye what's the matter. Day before yesterday a nice little bungalow stood over here in the woods ready to keep the night chills and the rain off any law-abidin' citizen that made up his mind to lay his head on the pillows inside. Yesterday, the wind was a whistlin' through it, and the whole bloomin' concern looked like it had been hit by a Kansas cyclone. There wasn't a dodgasted window left in the place. Matter, says you, matter! Well, you can explain that to old Judge Grander, because I'm agoin' to arrest the whole bloomin' outfit.

Mr. Hale—Now, Mr. Constable, our boys do not destroy property and I am sure that you are accusing the wrong crowd, but I assure you that if, by the remotest chance, any of our fellows are found to be guilty they shall not stay another day in this camp. Furthermore, I shall at once take steps to replace the windows at my own expense.

Constable—Well, I'll give ye a chance to do something about it. Ye look like a pretty straight feller, and I s'pose you do have your hands well nigh full up with this pack of (*shudders*)—Ugh—I wouldn't have your job for all the money on earth.

(Exit Constable Squire to the right)

Mr. Hale—(*Heaving a great sigh*)—Well, camp life is certainly one blooming thing after another. But then the boys seem to be having the time of their lives, so I presume it's all in the game.

(Loud cries of boys, mingled with the honking of an auto horn, are heard outside.)

Mr. Hale—What on earth has happened now?

Bill—(*Rushing onto stage almost out of breath*)—Oh, Mr. Hale, come quick—Dick has been run down by an automobile. I'm afraid he's dead.

Mr. Hale—Where is he?

Bill—Over there—(*pointing to left.*)

(*Mr. Hale rushes off, followed by Bill.*)

(*A moment later all boys of the Camp except Jack enter with Mr. Hale and the chauffeur, the latter carrying Dick. Dick is taken into tent, while boys crowd about door. Mr. Hale appears again.*)

Mr. Hale—Get the doctor, quick, one of you: (*Enter Doctor*) Oh, here he is. Hurry up, Doc. (*Both enter tent.*)

Mr. Hale—(*Reappearing and looking very much distressed*)—Boys, stand back from the tent, please. Now, how did this happen?

(*All boys start to talk at once at tops of their voices.*)

Boys, boys—be quiet. (*Boys quiet down.*) Bill, you tell me all about it.

Bill—Well, it was this way, Mr. Hale. Jack meets Dick out in the road and Jack says something mean about Dick being sent home and getting all that was coming to him. Dick gives him a piece of his mind. Jack stands in the middle of the road, and Dick is off to the side. Jack starts his old gag of wanting to fight, and is just about ready to start in, when all of a sudden a big machine comes a tearin' down the line at 60 miles an hour. Jack hears the horn and turns around. Then he gets all mixed up and don't seem to know which way to run. The first thing I know, Dick jumps right at him, shoves him across to the other side, and then sprawls out on the road with the auto right on top of him.

Mr. Hale—Where is Jack now?

Jack—(*Entering*)—Here I am, sir. (*Takes Mr. Hale by the arm and speaks with great emotion*)—Tell me, please, is—is—is Dick dead?

Mr. Hale—No, not dead, Jack, but I'm afraid he is very seriously injured. We can only hope for the best.

Jack—(Hanging his head)—Mr. Hale, I want to tell you somethin'. Dick didn't take that money from your tent—I did it, and let him take the blame. I've always treated him like a cad, and here he went and saved my life. (Grasps Mr. Hale by both arms)—Please, please, have me arrested—lick the life out of me—do something—I can't stand it—

(Doctor appears in door of tent. Jack rushes up to him.)

Oh, Doc, tell me—tell me—how is he? Will he live?

Doctor—(After a pause)—Yes, Jack he'll live, but it was a mighty narrow escape. I'll take him over to the hospital until he is on his feet. One of you will please help me with the stretcher.

(Doctor re-enters tent.) (All rush for door, and Jack jumps in front of them, holding up his hand.)

Jack—Hold on, fellows—Nobody but me is going to help the Doc, and if Mr. Hale will just give me another chance I'll show you that I can be as straight a guy as any of the rest of you.

(Reaches down just inside flap of tent, picks up stretcher by front handles, and starts to walk across stage, assisted by Doctor.)

Ed—(Going up to Doctor)—Doc, let me take the other end, will you? Dick's a prince.

(Jack and Ed carry off stretcher, followed by the other boys, as curtain falls.)

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